

Region 5 Fire and Aviation Management Recruitment & Retention Survey Results

Prepared by: Recruitment & Retention Team

4/22/2022

Information Included in Presentation

- Graph of Results of each variable by Forest
- Highlighted commentary made in Survey organized by variable and frequently mentioned topic.
- They can be found at the end of the PPT for reference.

Intention and Goal of R&R Survey

- The Region 5 Fire and Aviation Management Recruitment and Retention Survey was designed with the intent to provide the project team with direct insight and feedback from Region 5 Fire Personnel into issues and concerns they might have regarding recruitment and retention. The responses provided the project team with more comprehension into Forest and GS-level specific needs, furthering the project direction and plan of action moving forward.

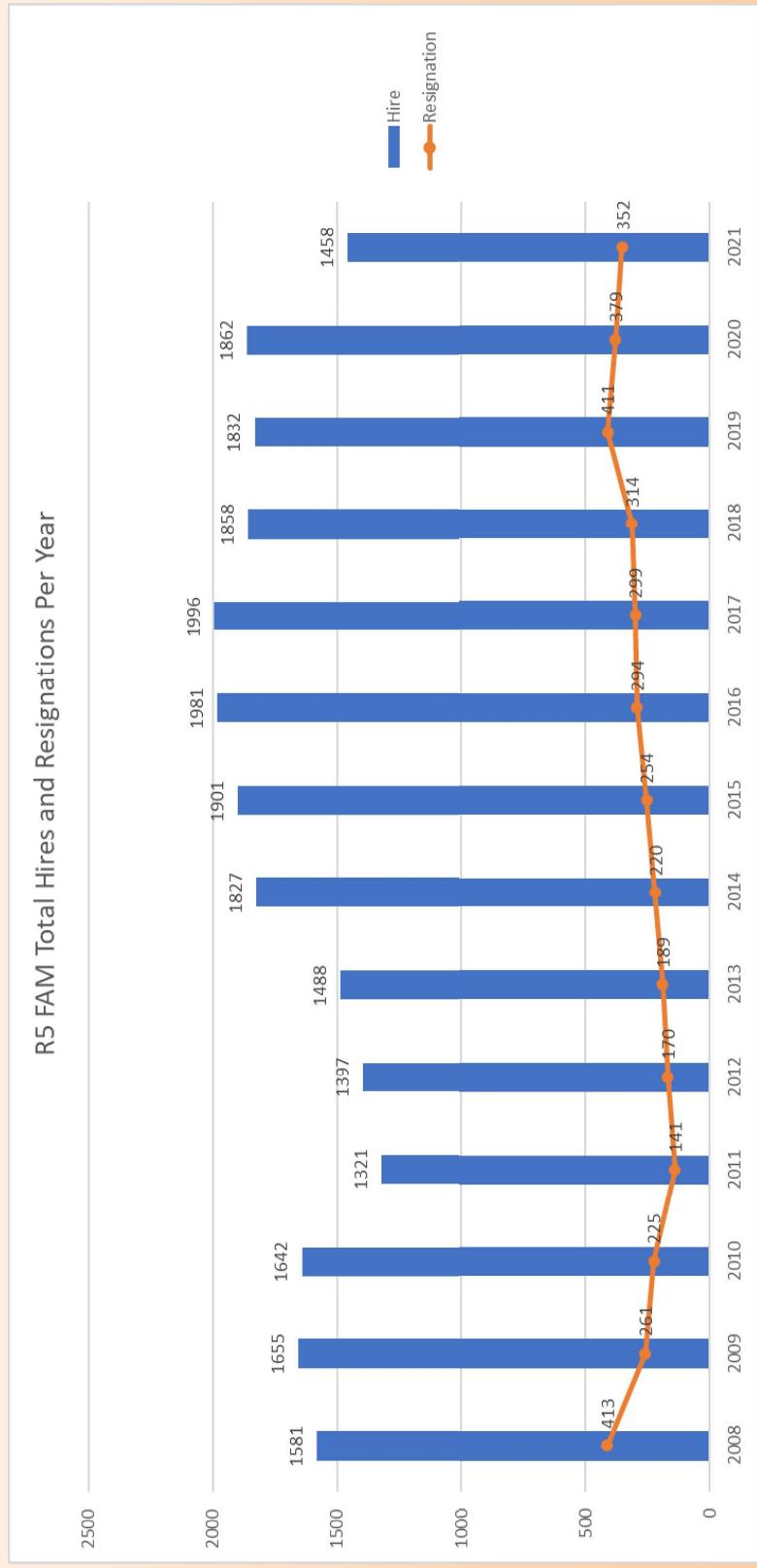
Region 5 – Analyzed Experience on Recruitment and Retention

- Region 5 Fire and Aviation Management has experienced ongoing issues linked to recruitment and retention. Vacancies in the program are not being filled in a timely manner and permanent long-term employees are leaving the Region 5 fire program due to numerous factors at play. These factors are reducing the program's effective capabilities to recruit and retain employees. Although the issue has been recognized and anecdotal narratives have been headlined, there has yet to be an analytical investigation into the issue up to date.

Total Resignation trend line from 2008-2021 from Personnel Action provided by HR Data

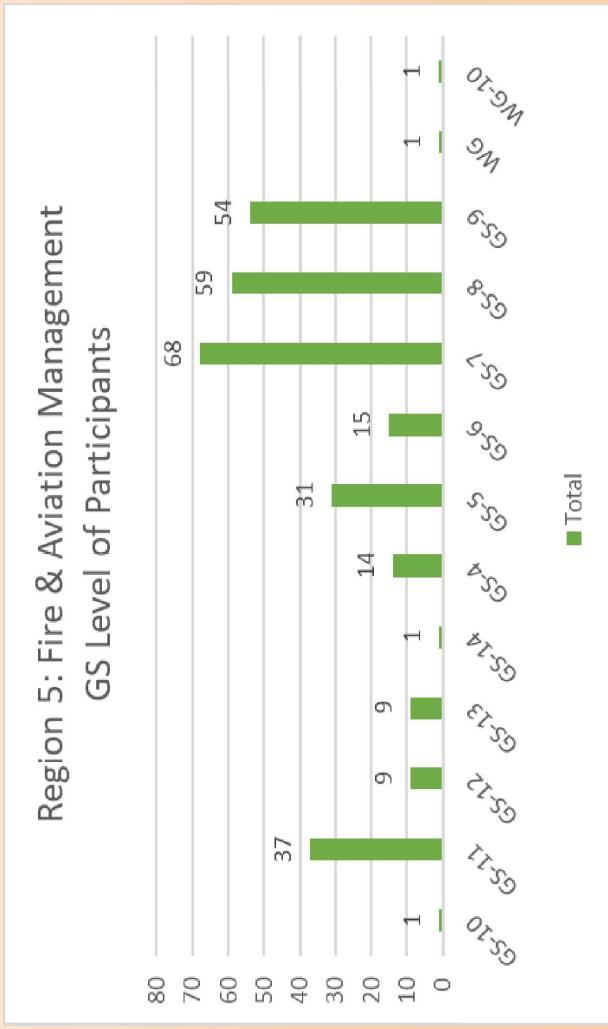


Total Resignations trend line on Total Hires bar chart from 2008-2021 from Personnel Action provided by HR Data



GS Level Participation in Survey

- The survey obtained a total of 300 submissions from Region 5 Fire & Aviation Management. The participating GS levels and WG were the following:



Introduction of Variable Ranking 1 to 5

- Responders were prompted to rank (give place within a grading system; synonym: *rate*) the 8 considered variables on a 1 to 5 scale.
- The 1 to 5 scale ranking of the 8 variables considered a ranking of 1 to be low priority, and a ranking of 5 to be the highest priority.

Explanation of Variables

- **Pay Scale:** Considering: Pay and benefit parity between Federal Firefighters and State/Private Firefighters, fair compensation plans that reflect training requirements and costs of living, etc.
- **Office Facility:** Considering: Facility health, facility amenities (cell service, Wifi, heating/AC, modernization, etc.), maintenance, facility location/proximity to- roads, freeways, major towns, response areas, markets.
- Office Facility was prompted to prioritize its sub-variables. Those sub-variables were the following: - Facility health, -Facility amenities, Maintenance, and Facility location/proximity

Explanation of Variables

- **Housing Facility:** Considering: Facility health, facility amenities (cell service, WiFi, kitchen quality, heating/AC, modernization, etc.), cost of government provided housing vs housing rental market, maintenance, facility location/proximity to- roads, freeways, major towns, response areas, markets.
- Housing Facility was prompted to prioritize its sub-variables. Those sub-variables were the following: -Facility health, Facility amenities, -Cost of government provided housing vs housing rental market, Maintenance, Facility location/proximity
- **Childcare and Eldercare:** Considering: Proximity to and availability of schooling and care services (federal, private, and/or public).

Explanation of Variables

- **Medical:** Considering: Proximity to healthcare facilities, access to primary care, medical transportation services, health care services.
- **How We Deal with Hiring:** Considering: Centralized Fire Hire events, hiring cycle (turn-around), how and where we search for applicant pool, lack of flexibility in terms of what you can hire at certain times of the year.
- How We Deal with Hiring was prompted to prioritize its sub-variables. Those sub-variables were the following: -Centralized Fire Hire Events, -Hiring Cycle (turn-around), -Applicant Pool, -Lack of Flexibility

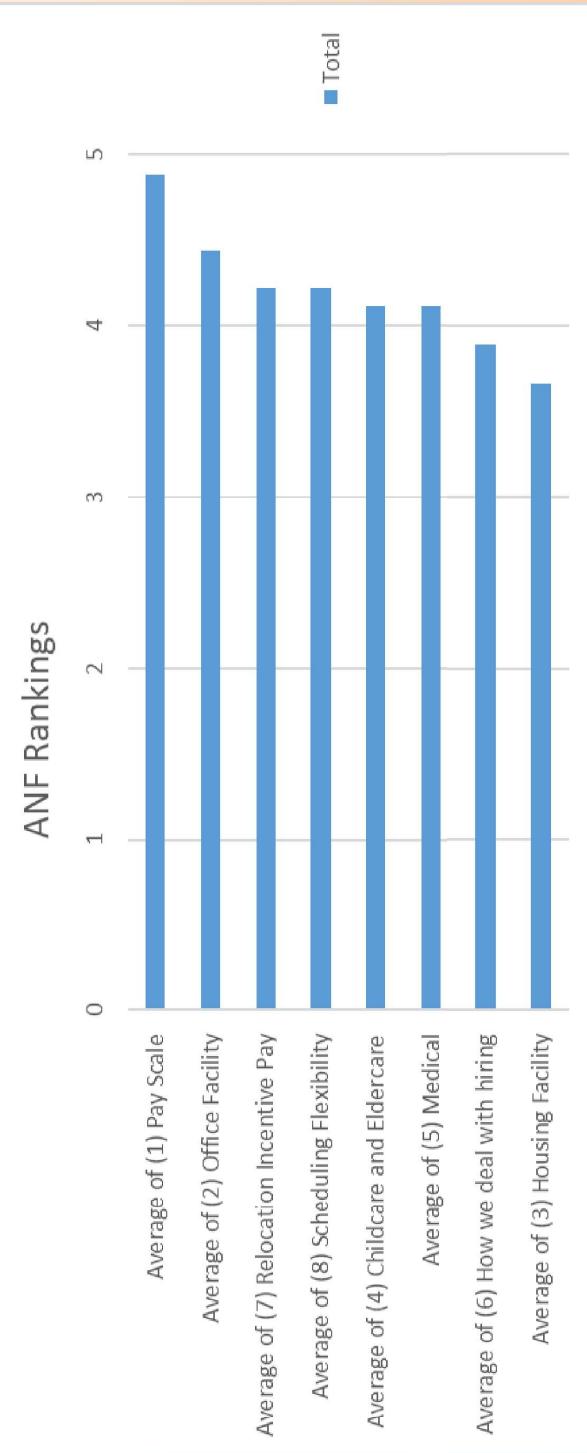
Explanation of Variables

- **Relocation Incentive Pay:** Considering: Cancellation of Transfer of Stations (TOS).

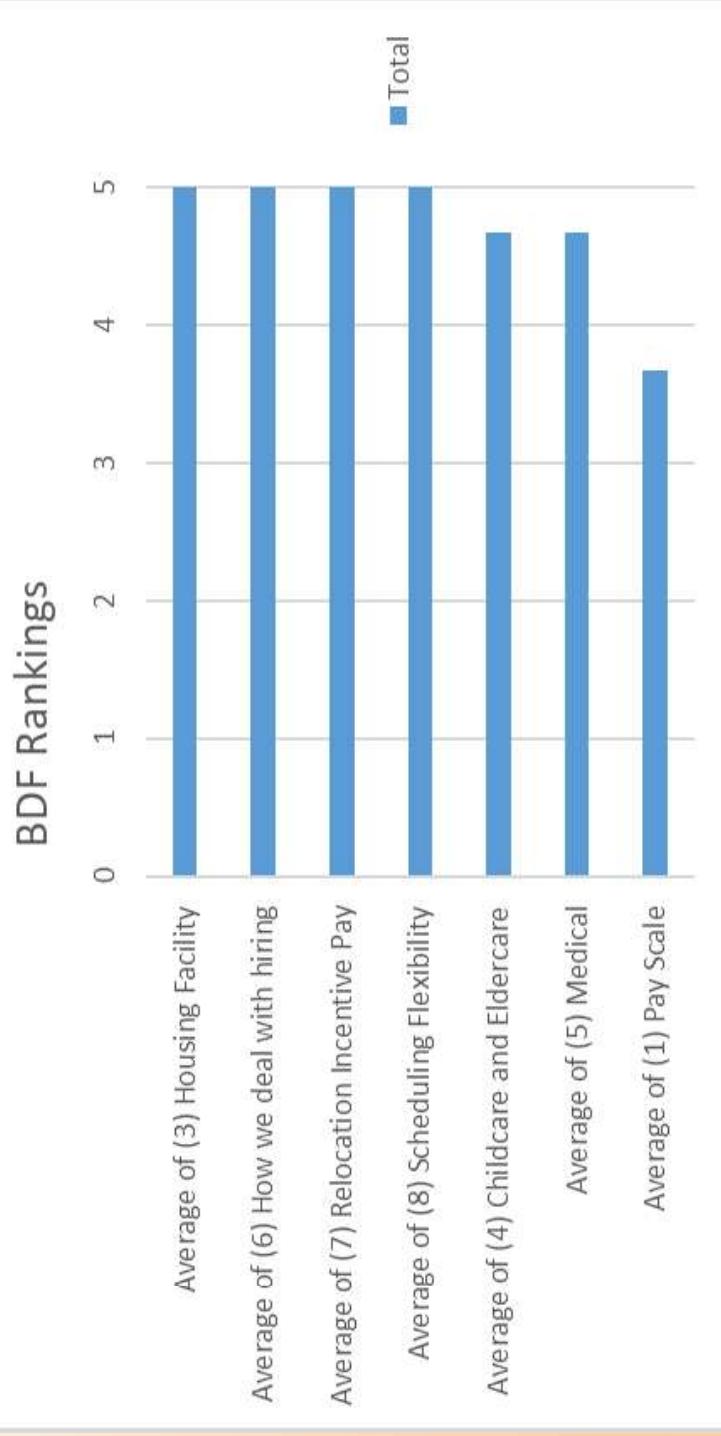
- A statement was shared to measure how much the participant agreed with the following statement: "The cancellation of TOS has prevented me from filling vacancies efficiently."

- **Scheduling Flexibility:** Considering: Telework, managing overtime, work hours (work-life balance), sick/annual leave.

Angelos National Forest

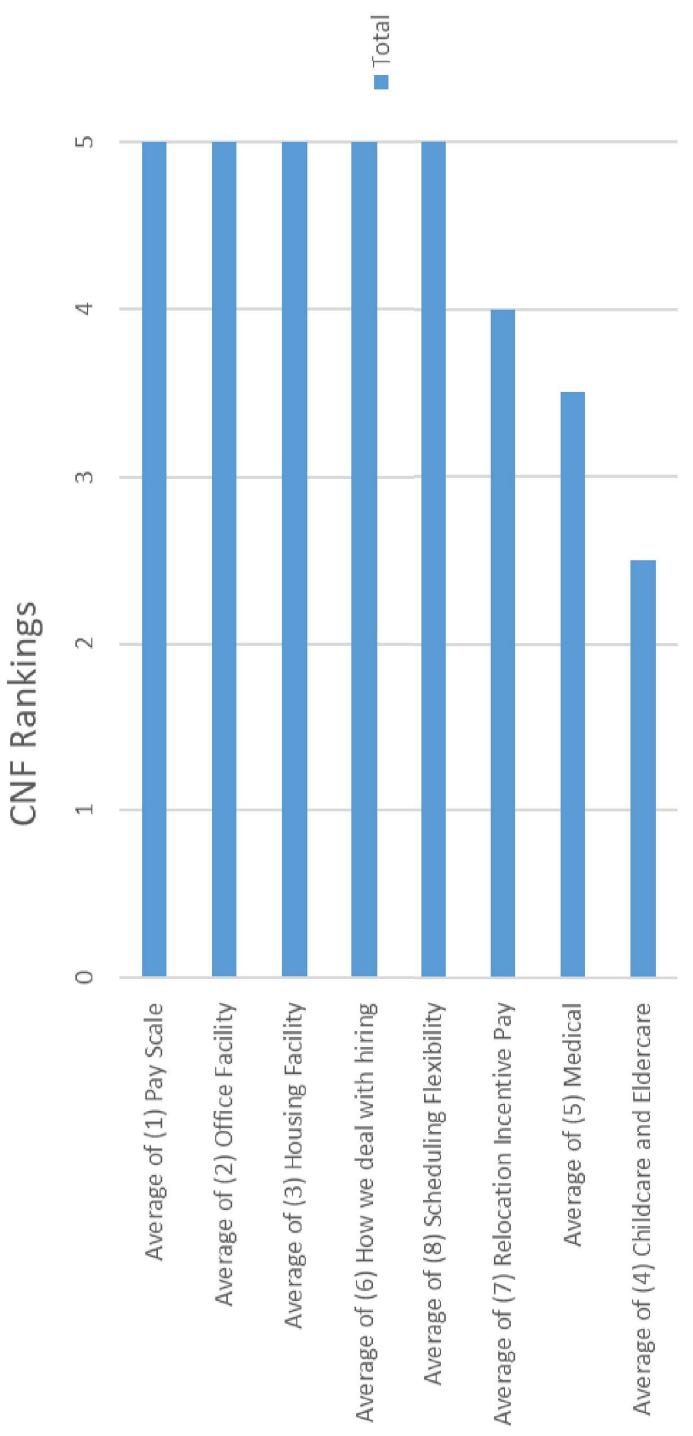


San Bernardino National Forest



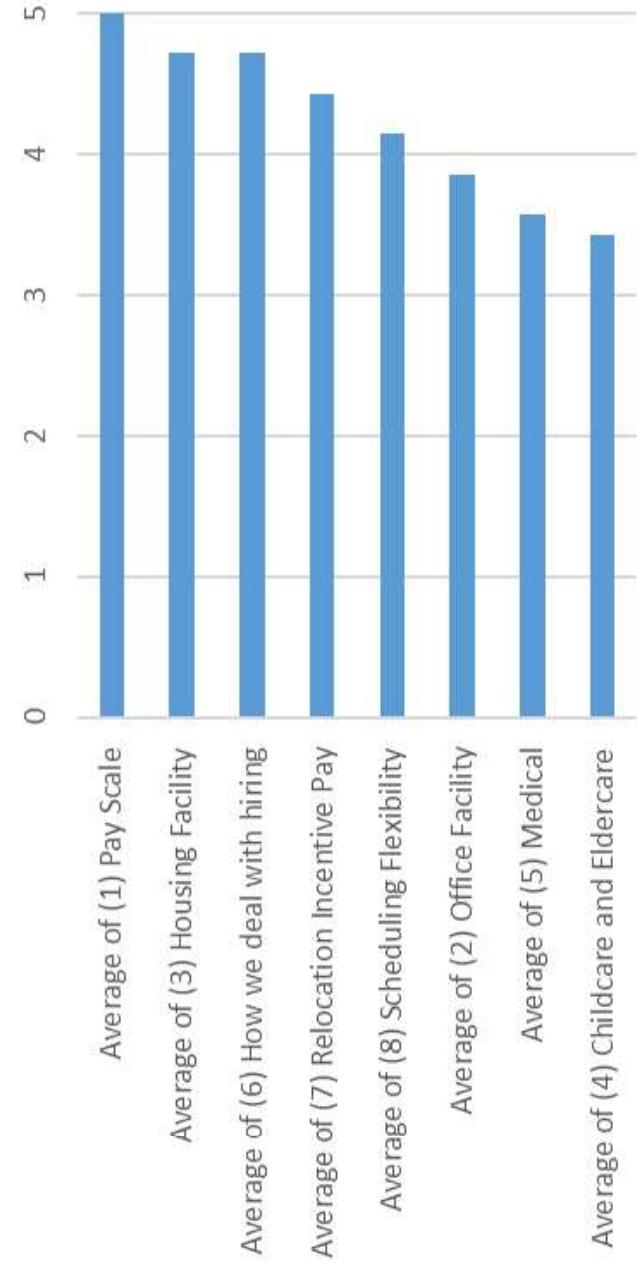
Values	BDF
Average of (3) Housing Facility	5
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	5
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	5
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	5
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	4.67
Average of (5) Medical	4.67
Average of (1) Pay Scale	3.67

Cleveland National Forest



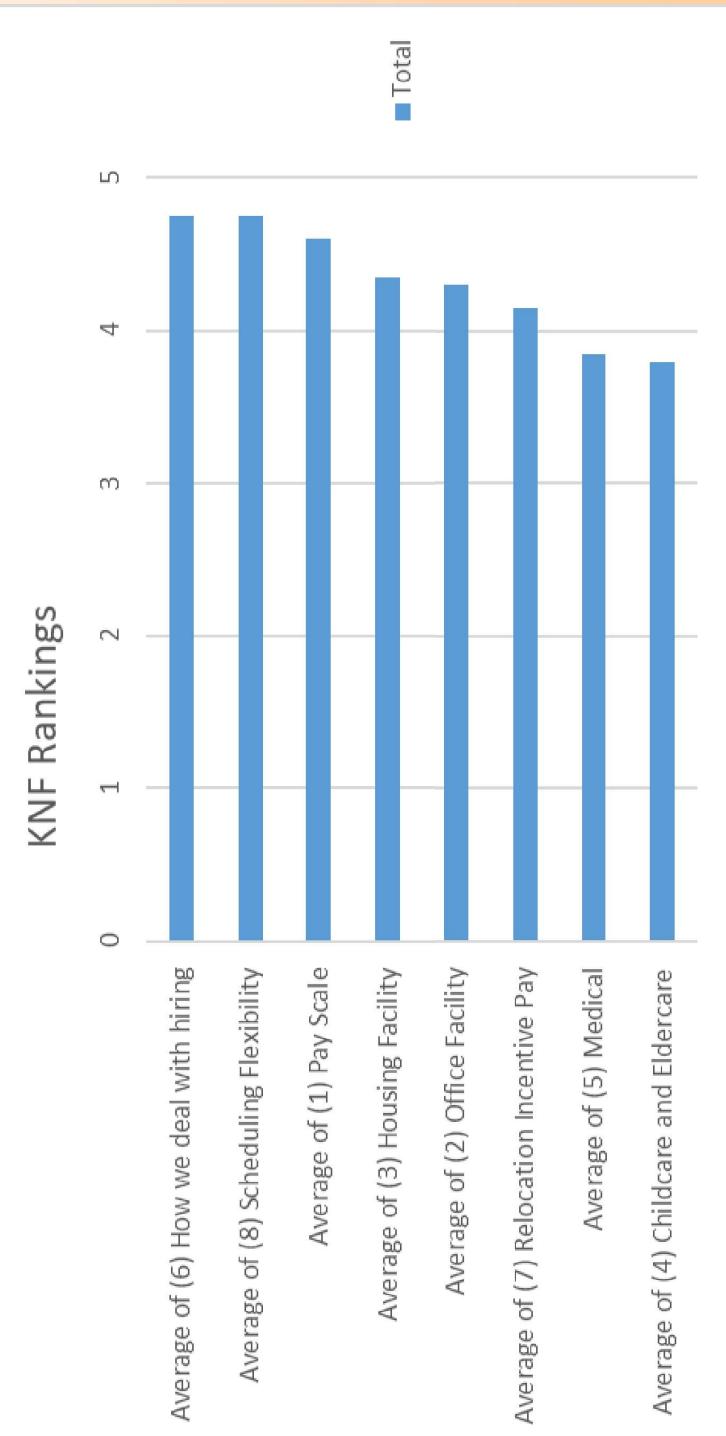
Inyo National Forest

INF Rankings

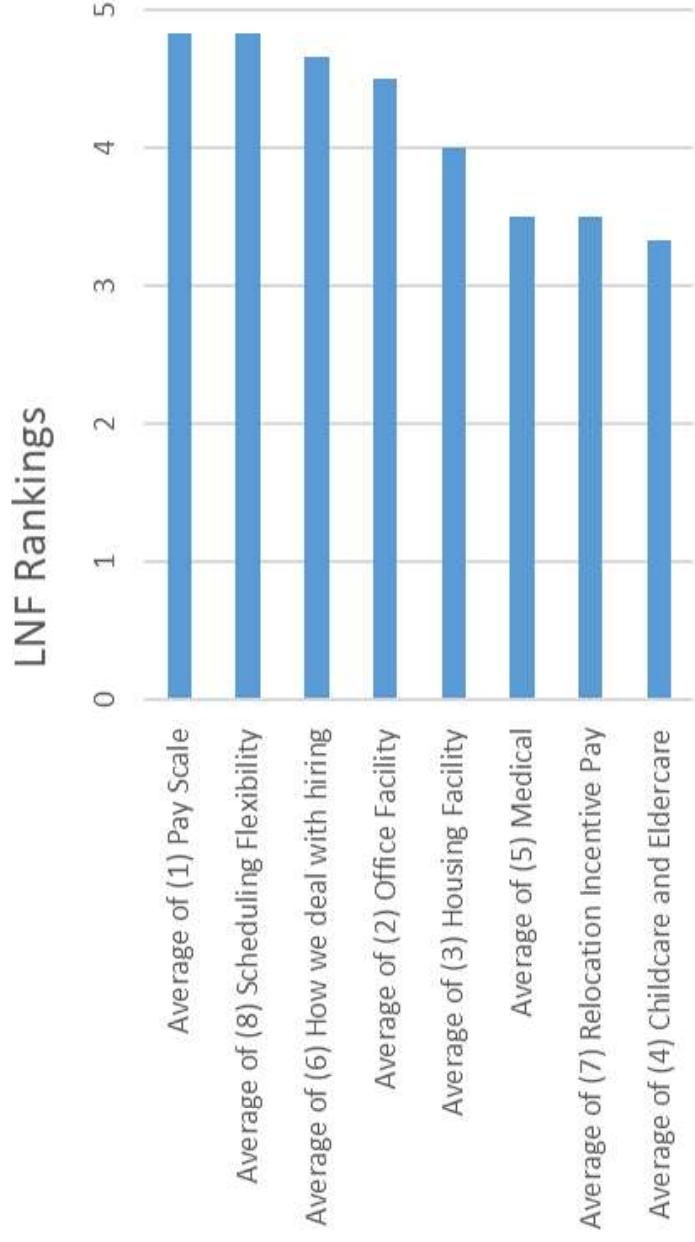


INF	Values
Average of (1) Pay Scale	5
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.71
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.71
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.43
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.14
Average of (2) Office Facility	3.86
Average of (5) Medical	3.57
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.43

Klamath National Forest

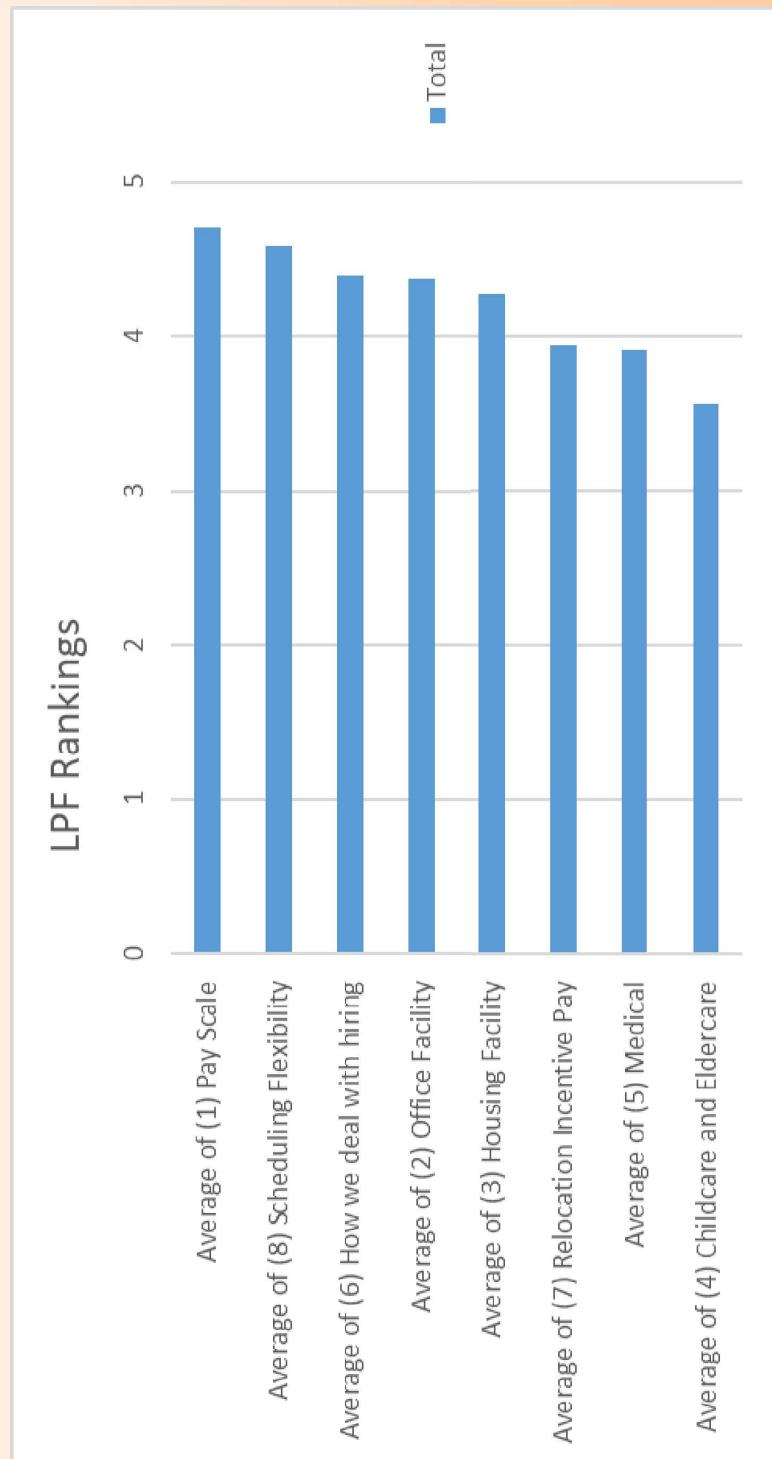


Lassen National Forest



Values	LNF
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.83
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.83
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.67
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.50
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4
Average of (5) Medical	3.50
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	3.50
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.33

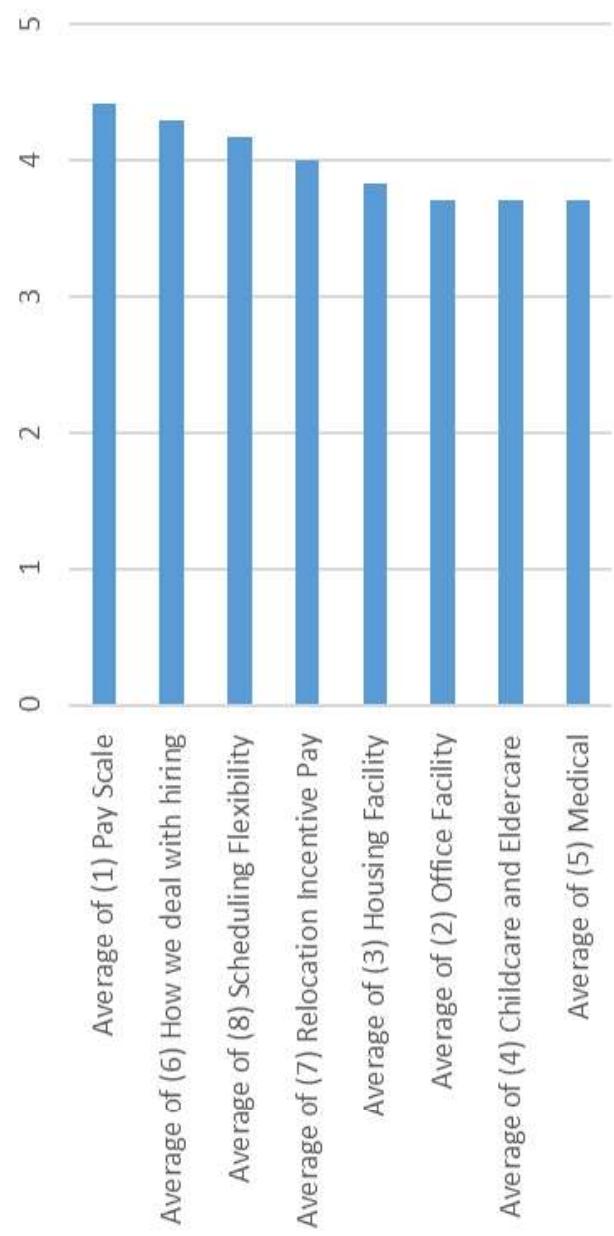
Los Padres National Forest



Values	LPF
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.71
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.58
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.40
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.38
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.27
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	3.94
Average of (5) Medical	3.92
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.56

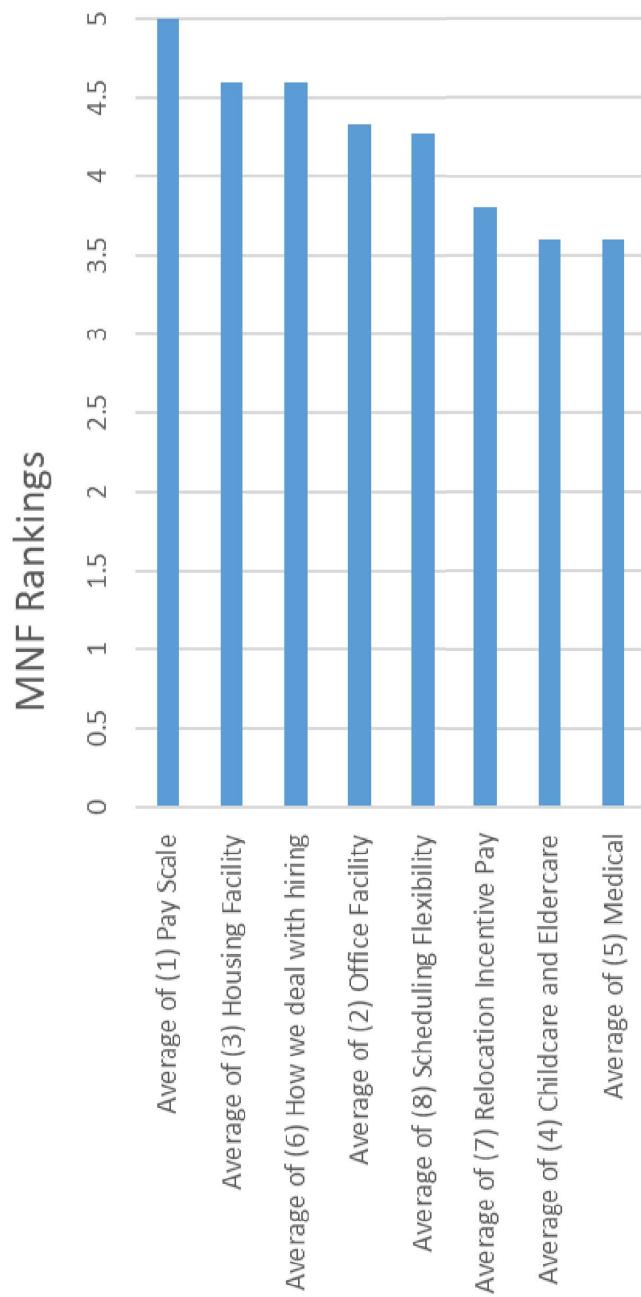
Modoc National Forest

MDF Rankings



	MDF
Values	
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.41
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.29
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.18
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4
Average of (3) Housing Facility	3.82
Average of (2) Office Facility	3.71
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.71
Average of (5) Medical	3.71

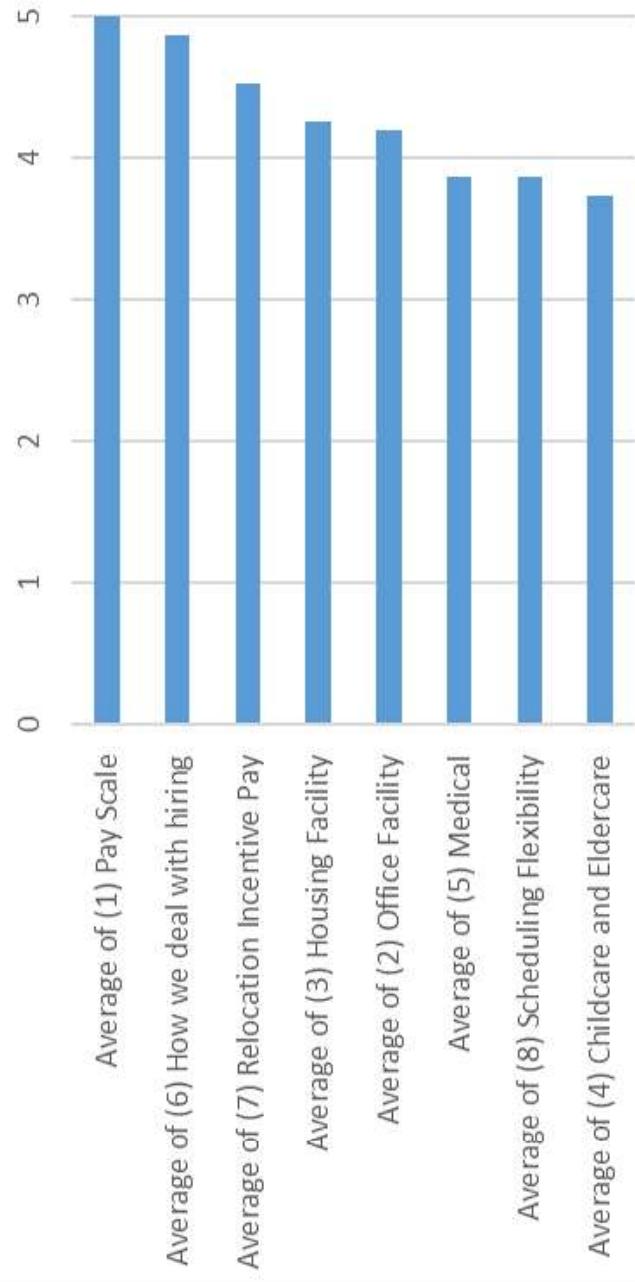
Mendocino National Forest



Values	MNF
Average of (1) Pay Scale	5
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.60
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.60
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.33
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.27
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	3.80
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.60
Average of (5) Medical	3.60

Plumas National Forest

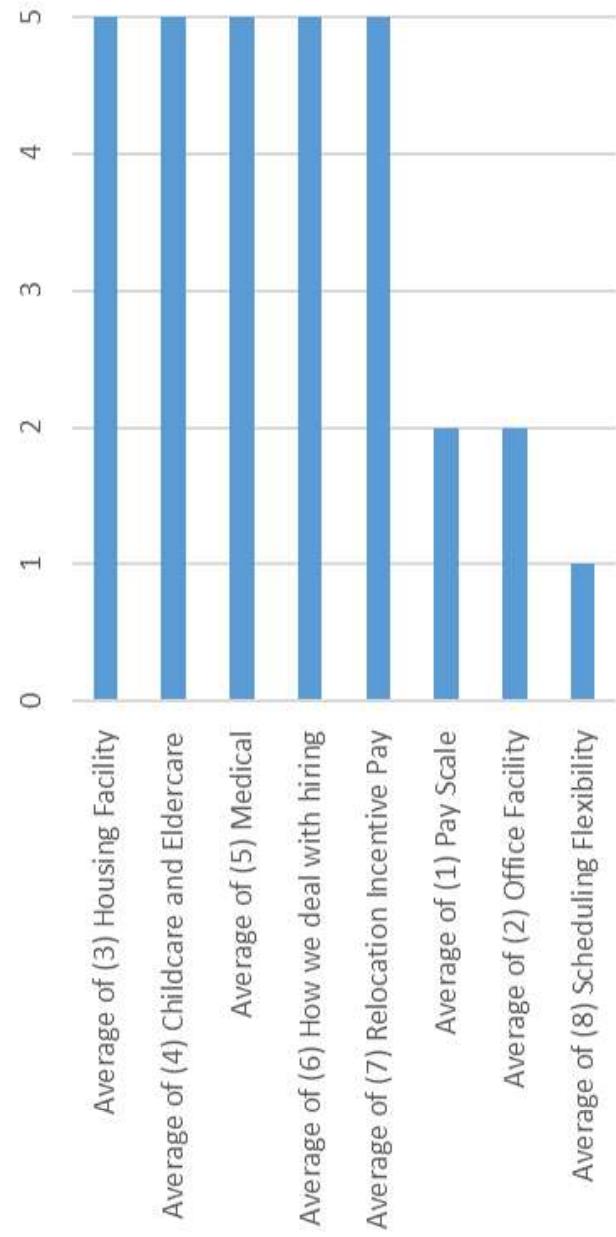
PNF Rankings



Values	PNF
Average of (1) Pay Scale	5
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.87
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.53
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.27
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.20
Average of (5) Medical	3.87
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	3.87
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.73

RO – McClellan

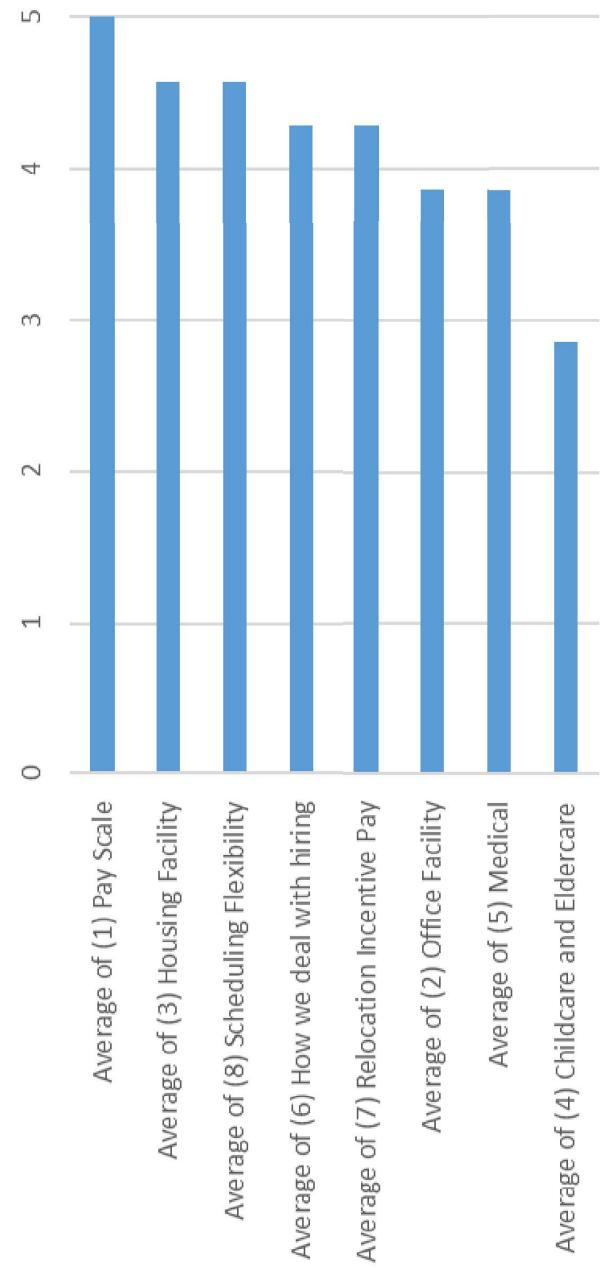
RO - McClellan Rankings



Values	RO - McClellan
Average of (3) Housing Facility	5
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	5
Average of (5) Medical	5
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	5
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	5
Average of (1) Pay Scale	2
Average of (2) Office Facility	2
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	1

RO - NOPs

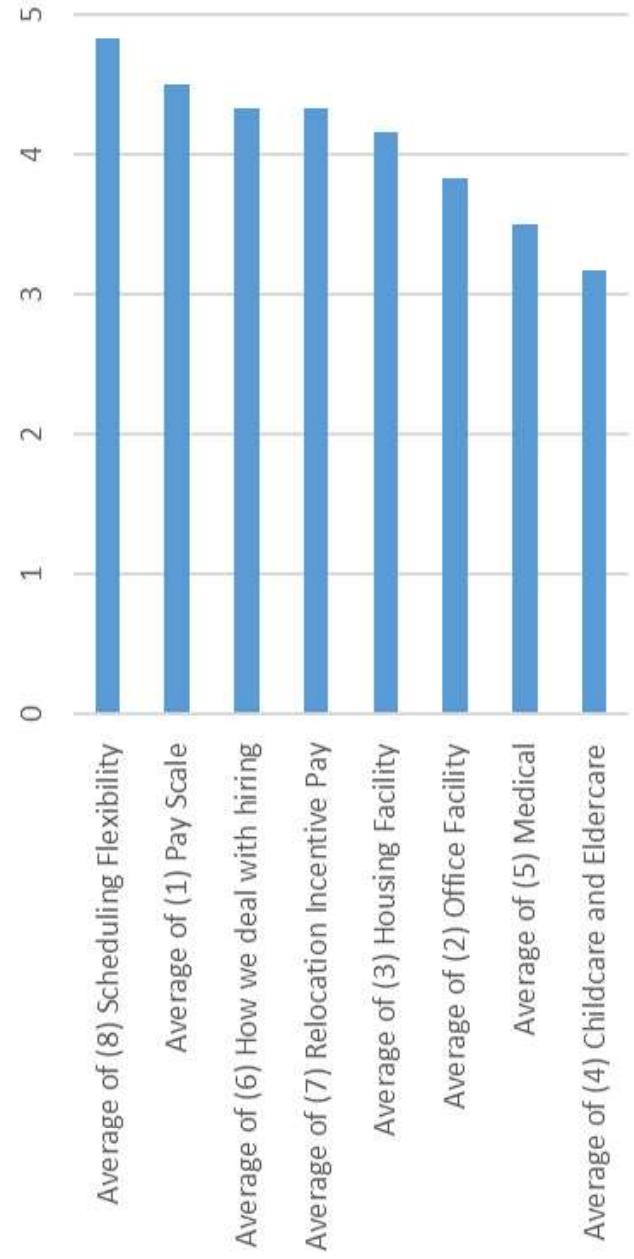
RO - NOPS Rankings



	RO - NOPS
Values	
Average of (1) Pay Scale	5
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.57
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.57
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.29
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.29
Average of (2) Office Facility	3.86
Average of (5) Medical	3.86
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	2.86

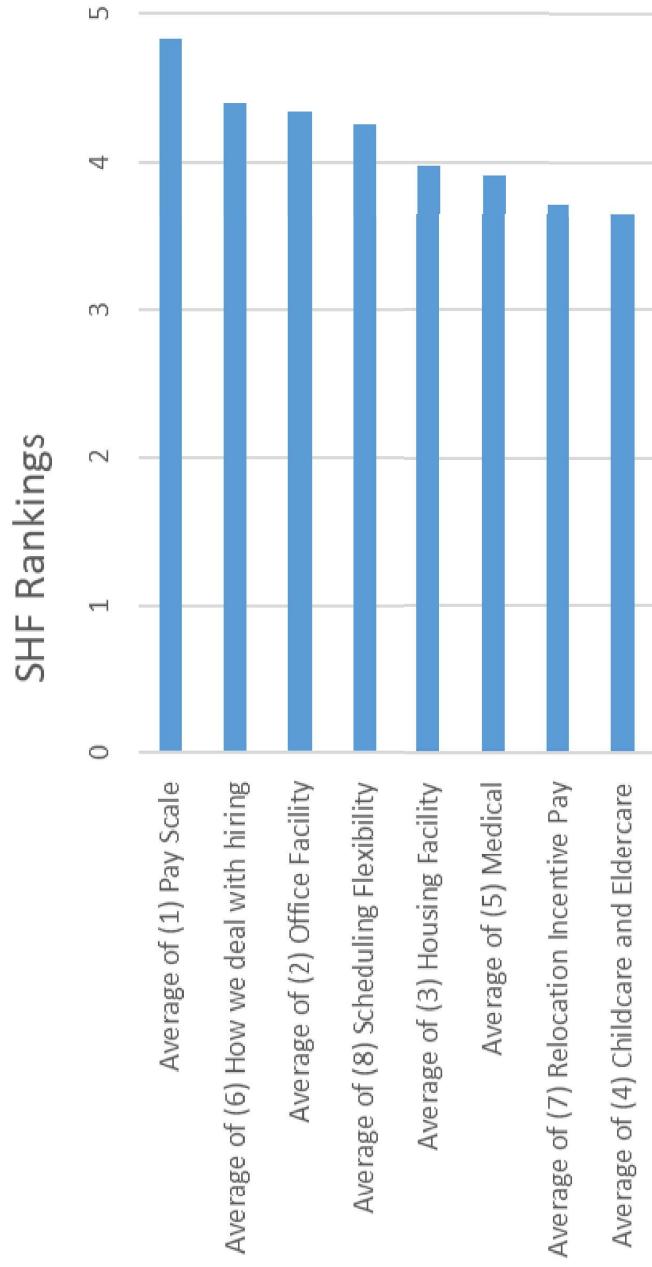
RO - Vallejo

RO - Vallejo Rankings



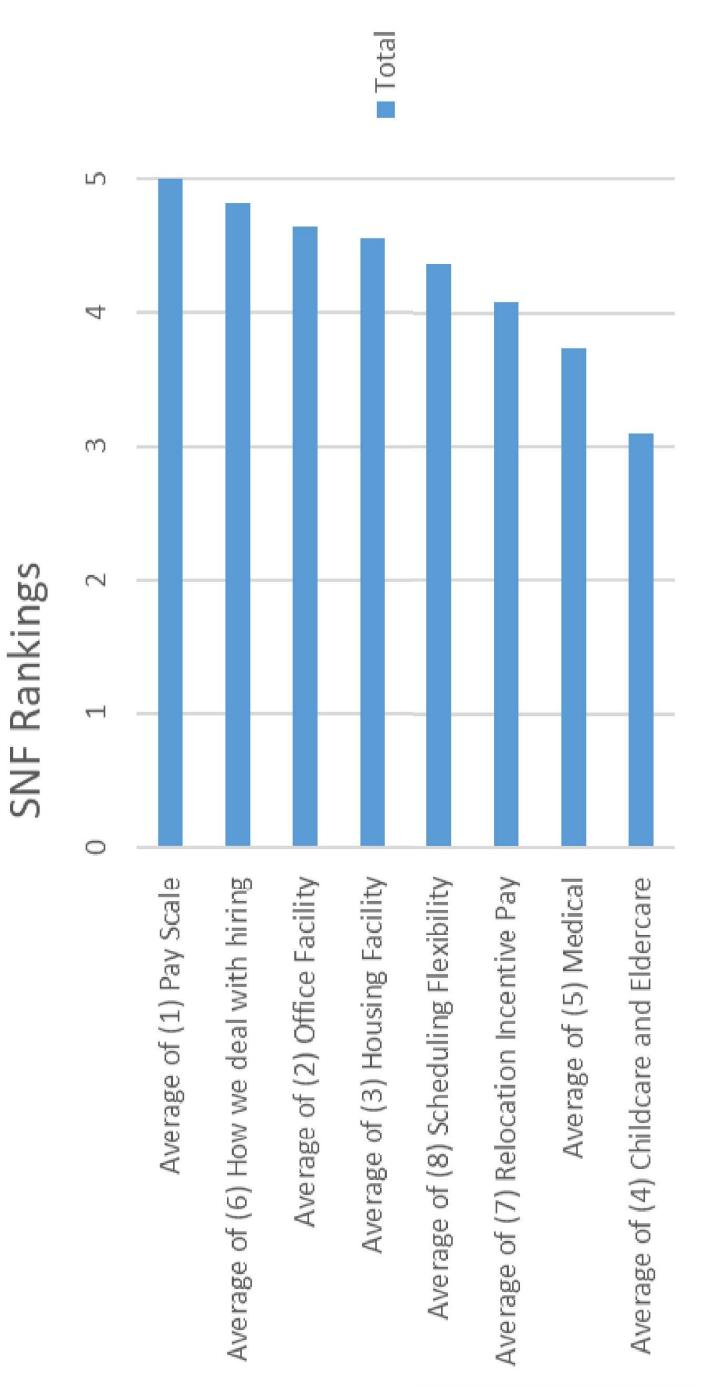
Values	RO - Vallejo
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.83
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.50
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.33
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.33
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.17
Average of (2) Office Facility	3.83
Average of (5) Medical	3.50
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.17

Shasta-Trinity Forest



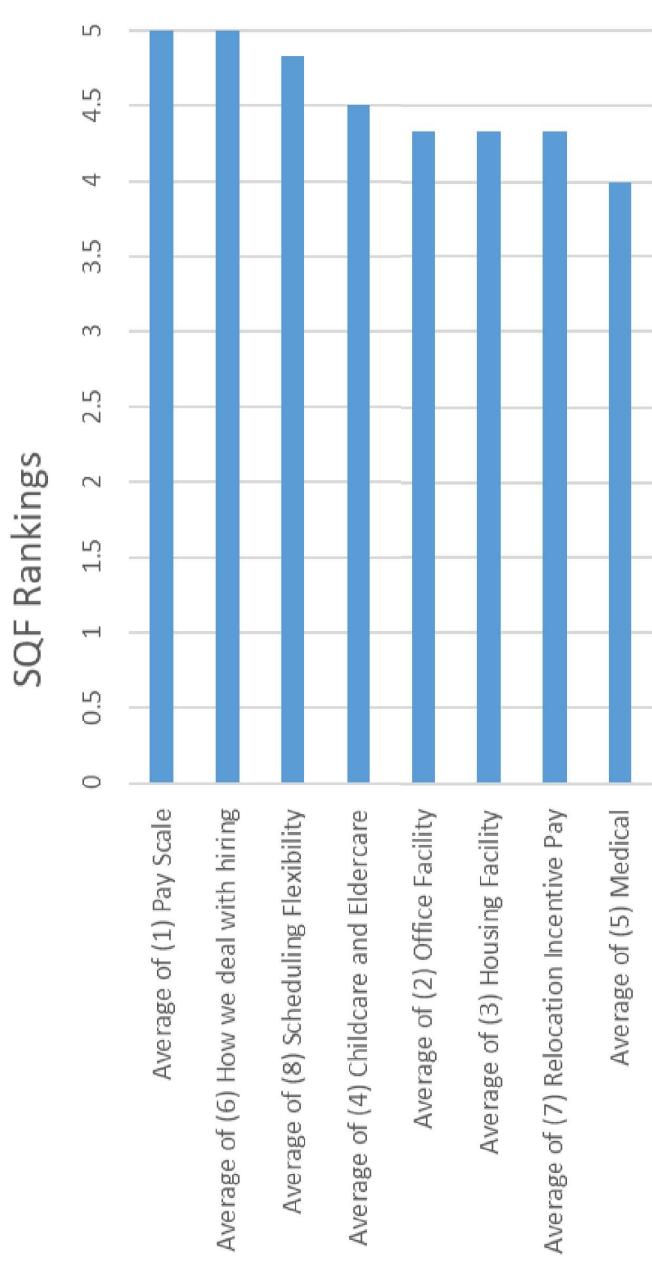
SHF	Values
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.83
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.40
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.34
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.26
Average of (3) Housing Facility	3.97
Average of (5) Medical	3.91
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	3.71
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.66

Sierra National Forest



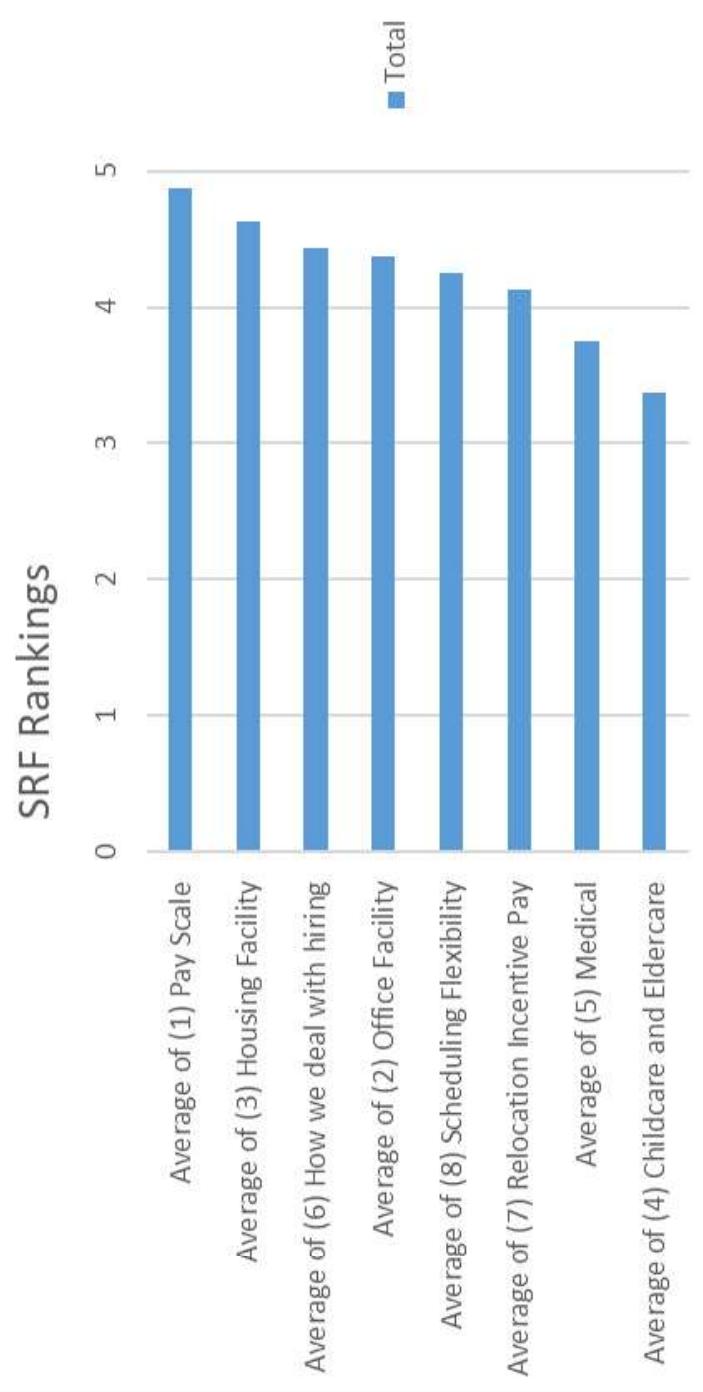
SNF	Values
Average of (1) Pay Scale	5
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.82
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.64
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.55
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.36
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.09
Average of (5) Medical	3.73
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.09

Sequoia National Forest

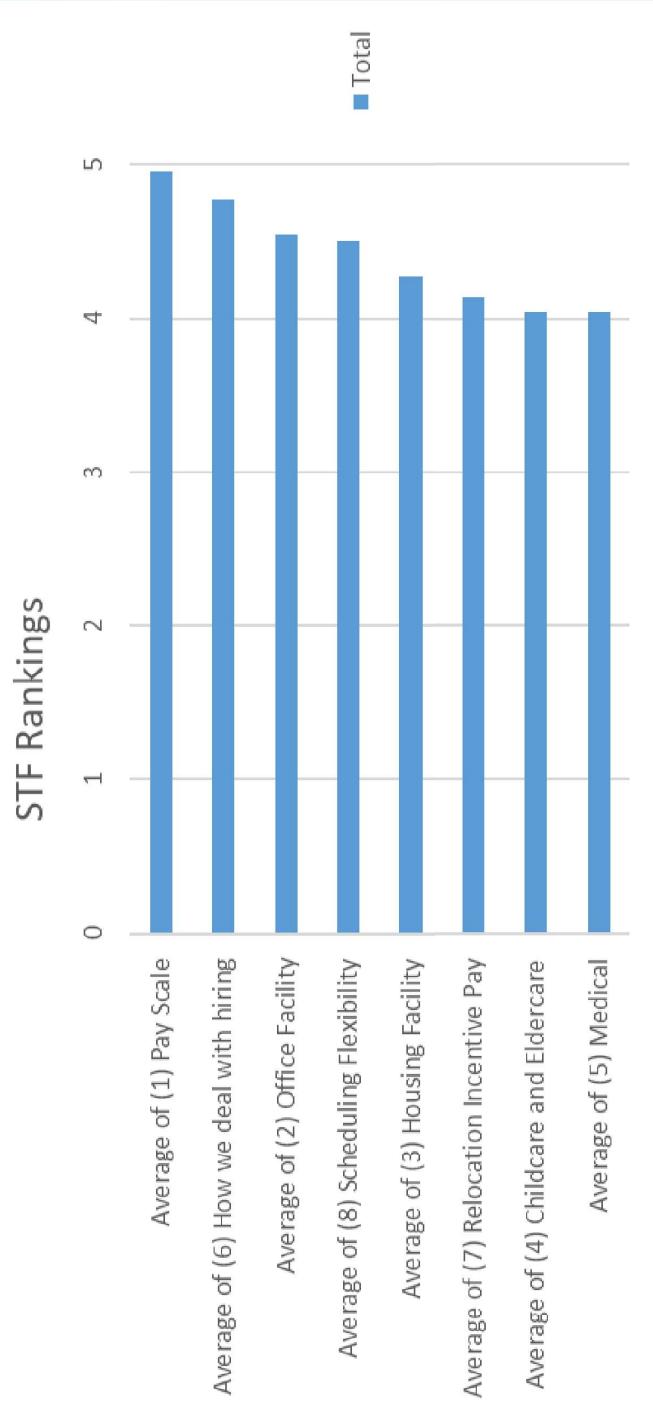


SQF	Values
Average of (1) Pay Scale	5
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	5
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.83
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	4.50
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.33
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.33
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.33
Average of (5) Medical	4

Six Rivers National Forest

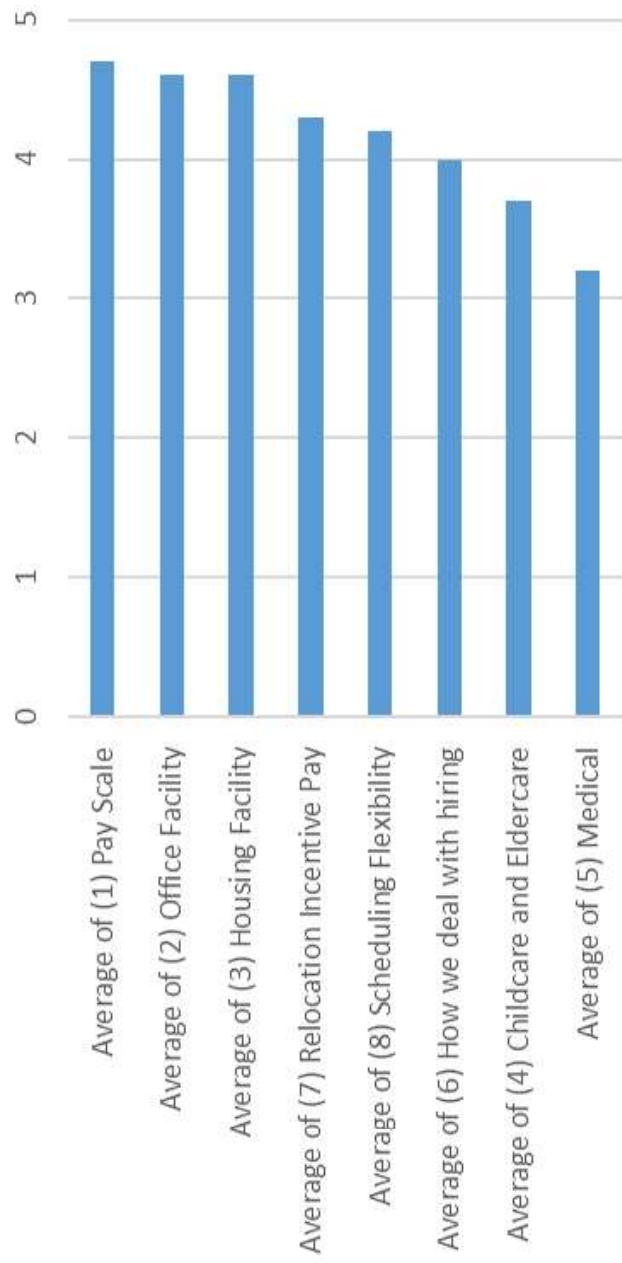


Stanislaus National Forest



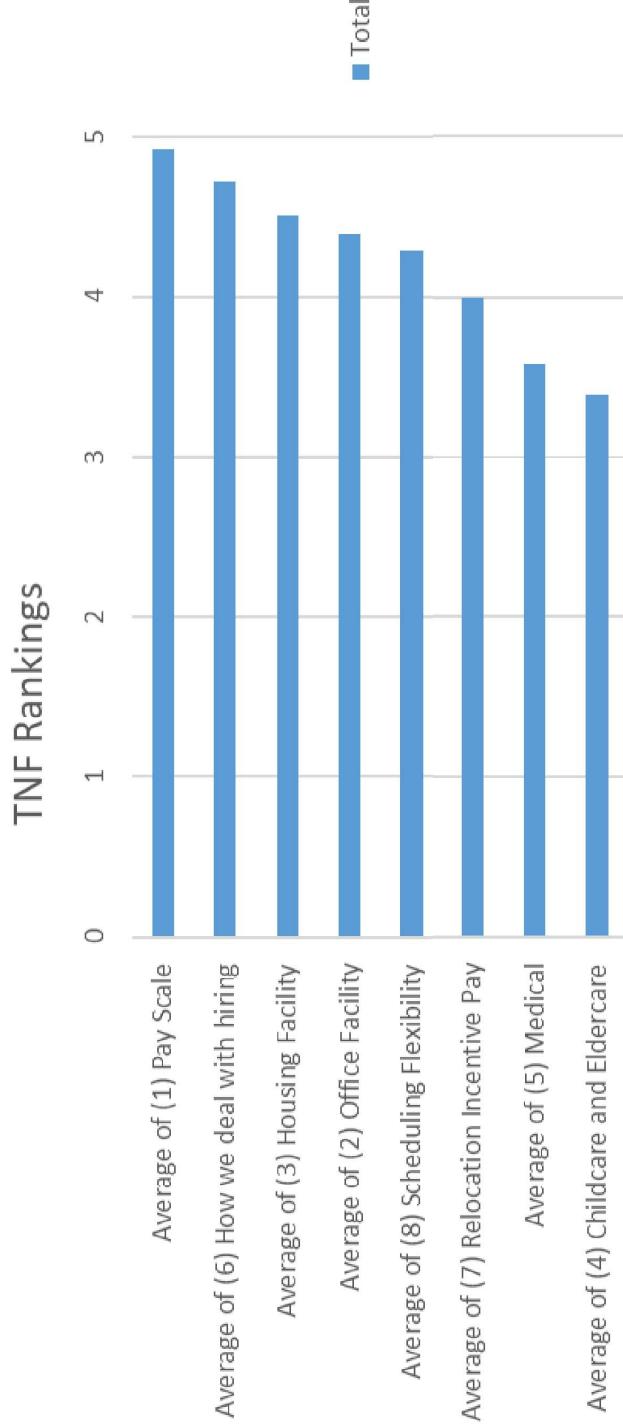
Lake Tahoe Basin National Forest

TMU Rankings



Values	TMU
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.70
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.60
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.60
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4.30
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.20
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.70
Average of (5) Medical	3.20

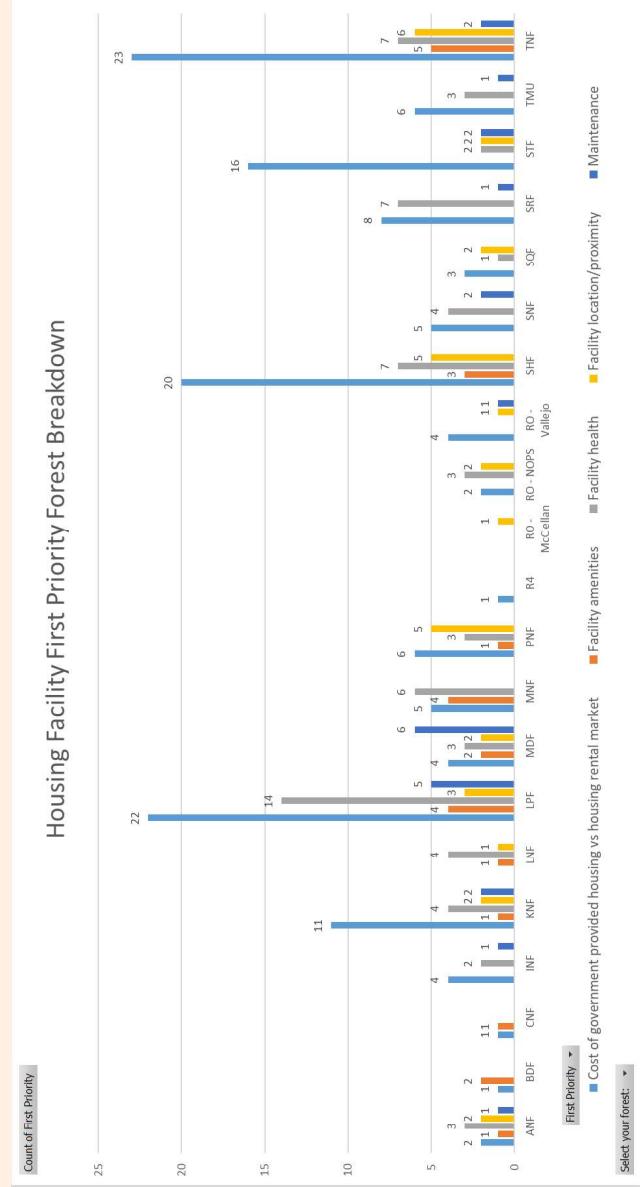
Tahoe National Forest



Values	TNF
Average of (1) Pay Scale	4.93
Average of (6) How we deal with hiring	4.72
Average of (3) Housing Facility	4.51
Average of (2) Office Facility	4.40
Average of (8) Scheduling Flexibility	4.28
Average of (7) Relocation Incentive Pay	4
Average of (5) Medical	3.58
Average of (4) Childcare and Eldercare	3.40

Housing Facilities

Sub Variable Ranking



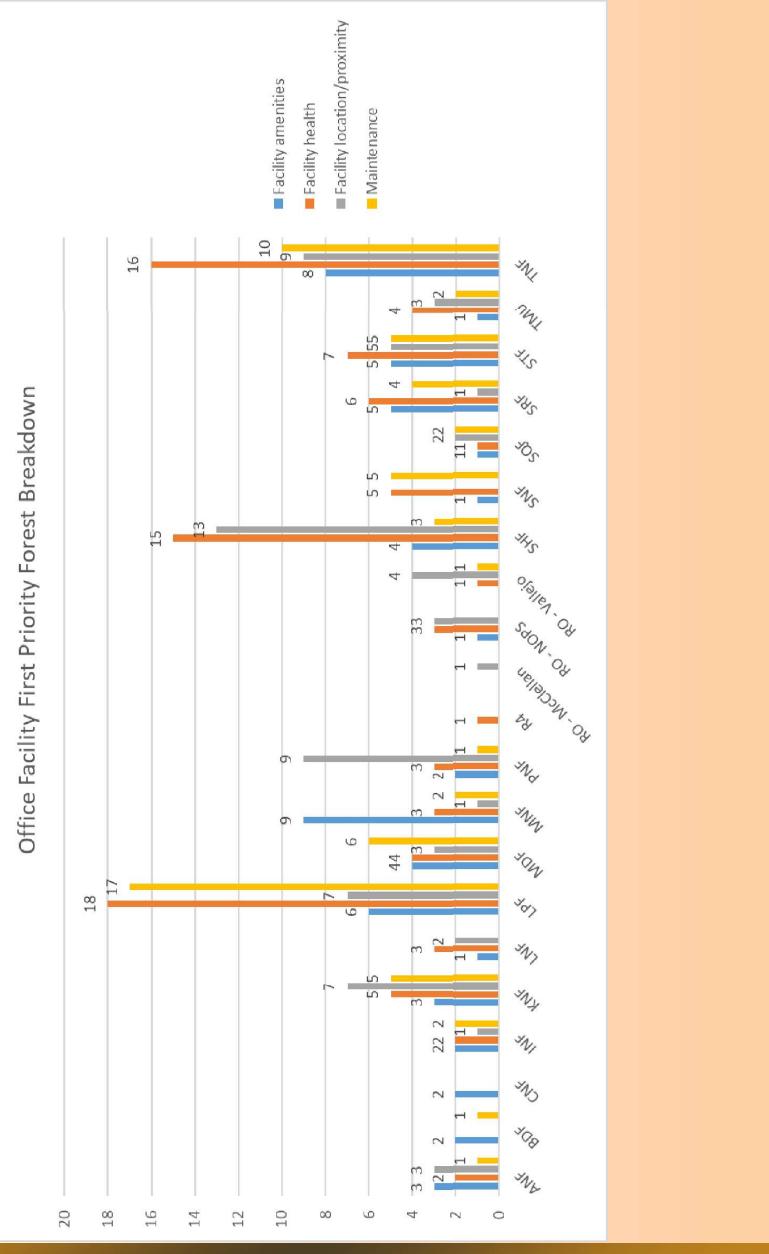
Sub Variable Ranking Options

Office Facilities

The Office Facilities Variable was ranked #5 out of the 8 variables to consider

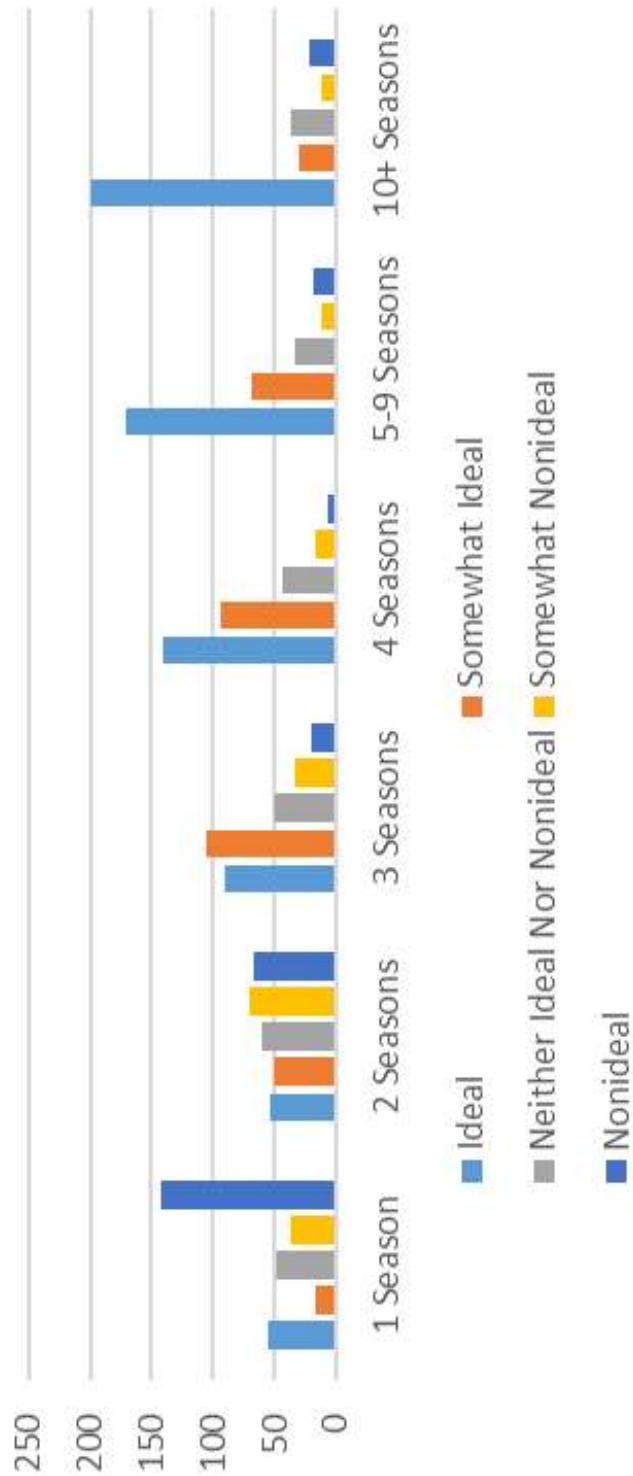
The sub variables were given priority by each participant and results were organized by Forest

Facility Health was the highest prioritized sub variable out of the 4 sub variables



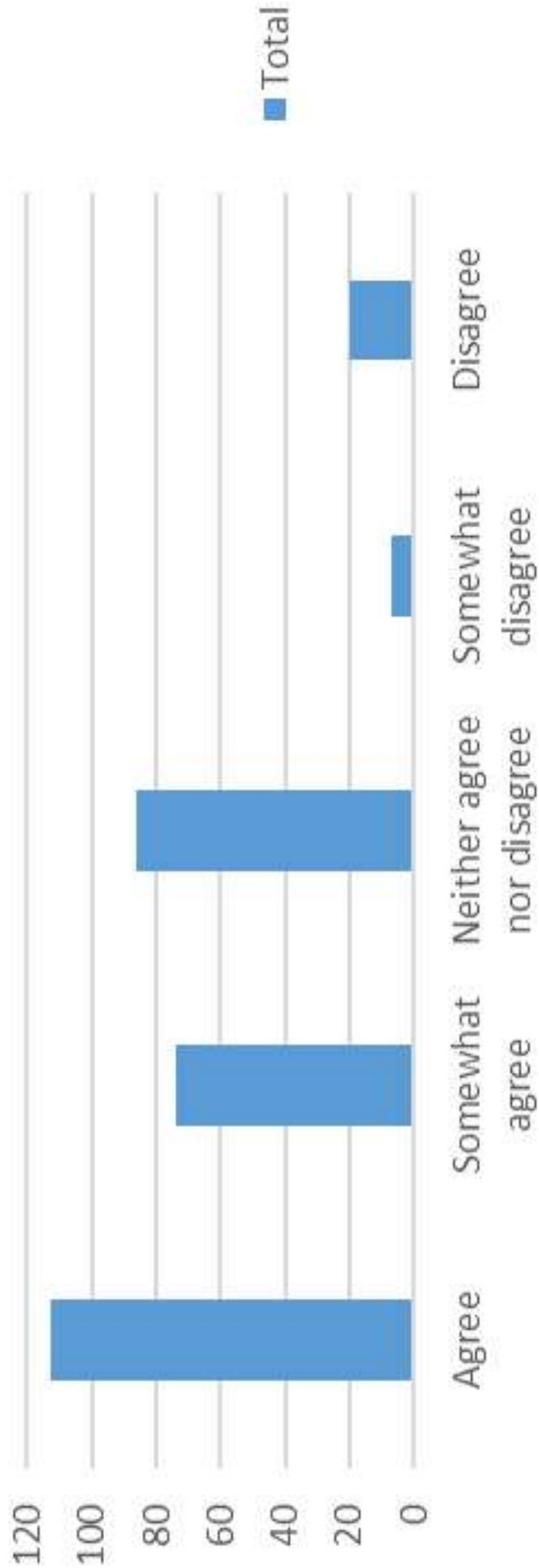
Regional Consensus on Ideal Number of Seasons an employee returns to the Fire Program

When considering employee retention, what is the ideal number of seasons an employee returns to the fire program?



Regional Response on TOS Statement

"The cancellation of TOS has prevented me from filling vacancies efficiently."



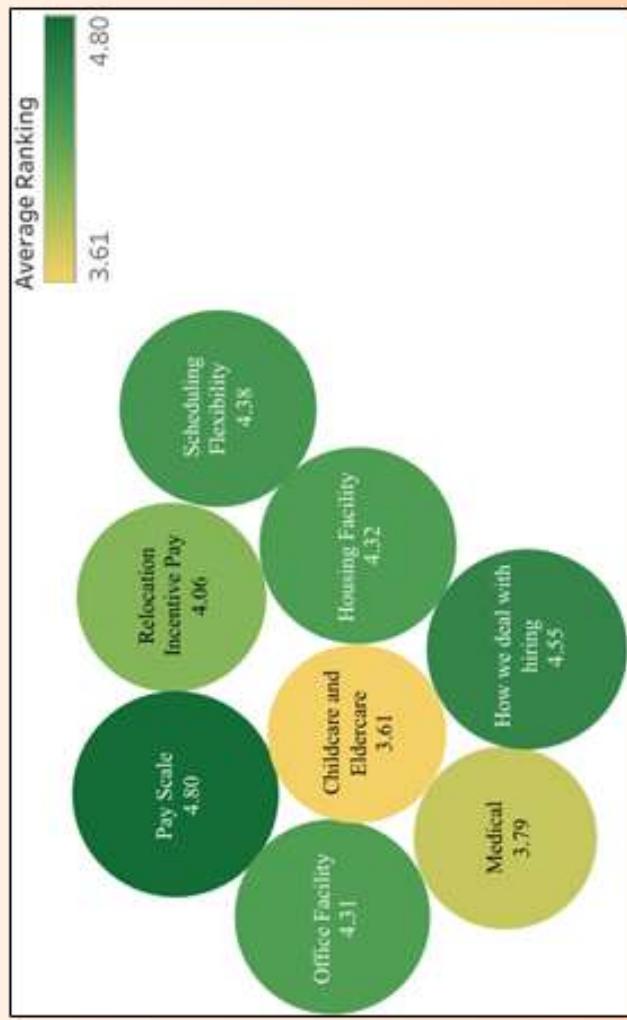
Survey Results of Variable Ranking Priority

1. **Pay Scale:** Will investigate the pay disparity between local/state and federal wildland fire positions while taking into consideration pension, retirement, health benefits, and cost of living.
2. **How the USFS deals with hiring:** Will be looking into hiring with regards to applicant pool, hiring cycle (turn-around), and lack of flexibility which were the top 3 prioritized sub variables, in that order. Centralized Fire Hire events will be investigated at a supplemental level.
3. **Scheduling Flexibility:** Work-life balance was a trending concern in the write-in responses and will be addressed by examining telework availability, overtime management, hours worked, and leave practices.
4. **Housing Facilities:** Housing Facilities and barracks will be examined by further exploring cost of government housing rates, availability, health and maintenance, and facility amenities. Facility location/proximity will be examined as well at a supplemental level.
5. **Office Facilities:** Will investigate Office Facilities by looking further into facility health, amenities, and maintenance which were the top 3 prioritized sub variables, in that order. Facility location/proximity will be investigated at a supplemental level.
6. **Relocation Incentives Pay:** Relocation Incentive Pay will be examined with regards to the Recruitment and Relocation Incentives process and procedures, as well as cancellation of Transfer of Stations (TOS).
7. **Medical:** Will examine the Medical variable by further exploring proximity to medical facilities and access to primary care, medical transportation services, and health care.
8. **Childcare and Eldercare:** Childcare and Eldercare will be addressed by looking into proximity to and availability of schooling and care services.

Survey Results of Variable Ranking Priority

The scale of our project focus on retention will have direct upward and downward influence across all organizational levels and will have the most available data to further investigate the retention issue. When considering the top 3 prioritized organizational levels (Module Level, District/Zone Level, Forest Level in that order) it was determined that Forest Level would have the widest influence and reflect issues at all other considered levels. When determining the ideal number of seasons an employee returns to the fire program, 10+ seasons had the highest-ranking ideal count with 199 individuals choosing the option as most ideal.

Survey results concur that responders prefer our project scale focus on retention at the Forest Level and examine how to maximize employee retention for 10+ seasons by further exploring the 8 considered variables from highest priority – Pay Scale – to lowest priority – Childcare and Eldercare.



Highlighted Comments

Note: out of the 300 submitted survey responses, many had repeated comments and remarks relating to the variables. We have highlighted those key terms in bold.

Pay Scale Ranked: #1

- Incentive pays (commute longer distances, cost of living) – no incentive is offered to want to work for the agency; pay incentive for red card? Incentives for college students (stronger student loan forgiveness programs or full scholarship opportunities with universities)?
- USFS will never pay as much as CALFIRE so greater flexibility in work tours will help combat attrition
- Reoccurring suggestion: Pay raise that matches that of the state and private agencies, cost of and annual income doesn't match. Better pay for less stress. Don't buy into the fact that 11's don't deserve a pay increase. Fight for annual wage increases (with steady benefit costs) that meet inflation rates. We need to be competitive on a compensation level. Pay the employees a competitive wage. At current pay rate, many cannot support their families. Pay needs to get solved before can solve other issues. Pay must support the boots on the ground and facilities not just salary; need thought and input from the ground up on improvements needed. Can't make a career out of it due to lack of pay. Greater and timelier flexibility with budgets. Pay disparity is what is causing local employees to leave the FS for another agency. "I feel guilty encouraging people to come work for such little pay in extremely high hazard situations"
- We don't always do same thing our cooperators do (not mirror image with less pay) – when we are on fires shoulder to shoulder doing the same job, that's when the pay discrepancy is the most blatantly obvious and needs to be addressed
- Make it attractive for entry level folks to start careers
- Local employees who enjoy working with the FS are looking into other agencies due to the fact that they cannot support their families; unable to finish their career with the FS because of pay
- There are many people that love working for this agency. We are beginning to lose or have already lost many of those people to the state or municipal depts, not because they wanted to leave this agency, but because they felt they had to so that they could provide for their family without having to work over 1000 hours of overtime every season to make ends meet.
- How can I encourage people to sign up for higher divorce rates, higher suicide rates, multitudes of increased health risks and various other issues for minimum wage?
- Our pay discrepancy has a direct result on retention, placing a higher burden on those who remain with the agency, taxing our workforce and creating a challenging work life balance

How the USFS Deals with Hiring

Ranked: #2

- Fill vacancies based on a broader applicant pool: Being able to fly positions as an "or" (for example GS-0401-11 fuels planner or GS-0301-FMO)
- Hire recruitment specialists
- **Hiring application dates** (year-round open and continuous announcements for all positions may increase candidate pool)
 - Fire Hire does not allow for year-round selections – Need a normal predictable hiring cycles – Centralized fire hire keeps getting approved, but we still face same problems with speed of ASC.
 - More than one fire hire event a year causes too many planning issues for coming fire seasons
 - Look at hiring lower grade employees for perm fire hire after seasonal fire hire pulls from seasonal pool which causes staffing issues
 - Do away with perm fire hire above the GS-5 level
 - Time between application submission, hiring event, and hiring to employment
 - We have always been able to hire people, we just can't keep them.
 - Open Continuous Register (OCR) announcements – give hiring back to the forest. Hiring should be local to the forest
 - Improve temp hiring cycle and efficiency

Training and Qualifications relating to Hiring Variable

- Lack of competent and qualified personnel (bottom of the barrel)
- Adequate allocations for training. Getting allocations from our cooperators that we pay to train firefighters for them
- Reconsider FSFPM qualification requirements
- **Training** for career development
- Issue with putting unqualified apprentices into hotshot crews – is the apprenticeship program working to really keep those folks in the federal agencies for longer than a few years? Permanent apprentice appointments should require 90 days wildland fire experience
- Retaining qualifications and skills. – What about IMTs and program leadership? ADs? How long should we be retaining and relying on ADs to supplement staffing at ATBs, dispatch centers, IMTs?
- Issues staffing fire trucks since going to centralized fire – Local high school students do not qualify for GS-03
- Temporary fire fighter classification (ASC) – seeing affects in Northeast CA
- Local basic 32 training (i.e., ROP Programs, High School recruitment, Junior College Fire Tech Program recruitment, social media=necessary evil)
 - “Do not lower standards for red cards”
- Permanent apprentice appointments should require 90 days wildland fire experience
- Until these positions are viewed as professional, and our training be acknowledged as high-level vocational training, the field will never grow

PDs and Classification relating to Hiring Variable

- Make a wildland firefighter classification and do away with forestry tech. Reclassification of Forestry Technician to new series that reflects what employees really do
- Accurate PDs that capture work assigned – Adjusting our PD's and training to reflect the realities of the fire environment today
- Realistic job series for positions, and career ladder for 0401 fuels planning positions
- Consider career ladder position and mentorship in projected future positions specifically fire prevention and fuels

Work-Life Balance

Ranked: #3

More annual leave for fire personnel

- Mental and physical stress to the body: Fixing **OWCP**/reducing OWCP cost and paying more to ensure – Presumptive risk associated with fighting wildland fires and getting cancer or other illness that can be related. Consider OUR suicide rate, alcohol and drug addiction rate, divorce rate.
- Presumptive illness: Improve pre-employment testing (think comprehensive physicals) so the Agency doesn't inherit an illness or benchmarker for years

Flexibility tours

Buyback of seasonal time

Length of fire assignments and length of mandatory time off (shorten the assignments from 14 days to 7-10 days)

Off season recovery for staff

Telework – return to work policy with no flexibility

Reoccurring issue: **Work-life balance** – Overtime is burning employees out

Recognize firefighter's efforts and struggles. Employees can't support themselves and **family** without overtime. **Better work schedule** – over time and hazard pay is where they make their money. Employees must work more overtime during summer and be away from families, to be able to survive winter financially. Results of poor work-life balance: issues with health and injuries, issues with marriage/divorce (we have a 70% divorce rate in the wildland fire community). Employees sacrifice their families, bodies, marriages, and mental health

Employees are overworked and feel unappreciated and undervalued

Lack of resource availability in response to major incidents and continued depleted, overworked, and underpaid workforce with low morale leads to issues with retention and succession

Reoccurring: **Portal to Portal** – fire personnel should be fairly compensated for their time

“PAY, TIME OFF, and WORKING CONDITIONS”

Employees sacrifice their families, bodies, marriages, and mental health

Update our 50+ year old schedule

Employees may end up going to less big fire assignments which means less money because the overtime and hazard pay is where they make their money

We can do better to support the mental health issues and difficulties that this job causes and or is responsible for heightening or enhancing the effects already within

I have school age children and location to schools, after school activities and daycare, medical is very important

Being able to work from home allows me to take care of my elderly relative and still work

How is anyone supposed to make ends meet childcare is \$1000 a month.

Housing Facilities Ranked: #4

- Government housing costs are not affordable to 1039 employees where approximately 1/2 of their monthly salary is going to a rundown building that they are sharing with 3 to 4 other occupants. Having limited government housing, FTE/PSE are not given the opportunity for government housing. Private rentals costs in the local area are not affordable for lower GS levels. Buildings are out of date and need updating (new flooring, furniture, appliances, etc.)
Having government housing provided to all Fire Seasonal force is important. We struggled last year to find housing for our employees. If the FS wants to keep these employees, it's crucial we provide housing. If there's no room (barracks) available, the FS should start allocating funds to create the appropriate amount of housing
- **These are all important. I would probably rate them all equal. They should all be a top priority.**
 - Housing is outdated, run-down and in some instances over-priced for what is provided. Buildings need major repair. The cost to rent a government house is a ridiculous amount with minimal maintenance and upkeep on facility.
 - Government provided housing must be affordable relative to the wages of employees needing it, especially in expensive housing markets. Housing should also be close to duty locations and/or amenities to reduce commute time. Cost of barracks is way out of control as is rent. Affordability is key in remote areas with difficult rental markets
 - Location is everything in today's culture. If you don't have cell phone service that is a deciding factor for some candidates. If the amenities are not close enough to groceries and other necessities that can be a factor as well. Location is an ongoing/pervasive problem. Does no good to have housing if people are driving hours each direction to report to their station.
 - Cost of rents is way too high for lower GS wage earners. CA is insanely expensive. Our wages shut us out of most neighborhoods and rental prices. Most of the workforce utilizing government housing is our seasonal-temporary workforce (lower grade). Most individuals aren't able to find housing in such short time frames from job offer to start date due to the poor hiring practices and delays we face in HR - most folks who are seasonal temps don't have the ability to pay first and last month's rent, deposit, utilities, furniture, etc. for a short 6-9-month window of service. Some employees who have families living in another area not in close proximity to the work center they are assigned to can also not afford to stay in the barracks. Most forest service stations are located in places where there is NO public housing market – We have limited barracks for 1039 and PSE employees - the key is to have available housing for all those level employees, as well as barracks for the ever-increasing amount of contractors completing our fieldwork on FS lands due to our Agency lack of personnel.

Office Facilities

Ranked: #5

- Continued lack of government housing
- If employees cannot afford to live in an area they will eventually not work, there and move on to an option where they can survive better
- Correlation between increasing staffing being met with appropriate facility improvements
- The money spent to house somebody in barracks is not equal to the money that goes back into the upkeep
- Work with the agency to give people higher COLA for the state they live in. Rent may be cheaper, but the day-to-day costs are not cheaper (gas, food, clothes). For temp employees rent is no longer cheaper
- Build more outstations
- Local housing costs and rent – research the housing market annually
- Duty locations: When it comes to hiring, most candidates have no idea a lot of these places exist (just names on a paper with the exception of popular cities). Not sure how to translate descriptions to candidates, especially since we usually cannot reach out to candidates until they are slotted to be hired
- TOS: Offering TOS is beneficial to getting people to move from one location to another; do not know if it has hindered the ability to fill positions on unit because we are not told if people are not accepting positions for that reason as it is considered confidential and done during Centralized Fire Hire
- Get better seasonal housing and work on paying them more money and getting them health benefits to add incentive
- Invest in new facilities or not meet our mission? The lack of engineering is hampering our ability to implement strategies for out years.
- Almost all of our non-leased buildings should be replaced
- Can't hire more employees for fuels and fire if we don't have the vehicles or facilities to support any of it – look into repairing/improving our station facilities that we already have. Red tagged buildings are still being used as everyday facilities
- Remote duty locations should be centralized in the nearest biggest city, and we should commute to remote duty locations on Agency time
- Housing and TOS are essential to attracting and retaining new talent. When it comes to retaining a legacy workforce, it's salary

Other comments: Workforce

- Stop using the lowest bidder of fire equipment – have a more streamlined ordering system
- Raise budgets of modules, due to cost of doing business
- Making 26/0 perm workforce
- Bring back perm seasonals to R5
- Stop encouraging seasonal help with no long-term career plan
- Work on getting people to want to stay on the forests that they are originally hired on, that way the investment we make on these people benefit the unit and will be able to move up
- Start at the lowest level and work our way up
- Work on getting all full time to reach fuels accomplishments in the off season and still have the numbers to respond to incidents in the off season
- Retain folks as it pertains to **safety** – change must come with input from the ground level, not decisions made by line officers who have no operational sense of what is being encountered on a daily basis